

The Chronotopos of the 1990s: Trauma and Triumph in Georgian Literary Texts¹

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*A text is written and it generates
multiple meanings itself.*
Umberto Eco²

Abstract

A collective trauma established in the cultural memory can function as a unifier of the in-group for a long time. The objective of this article is to clarify how April 9, 1989 and 1991, the Tbilisi War and civil confrontation, and a stressful series of sudden and intensive changes are analyzed, conceptualized, and interpreted in the fiction and memoirs created after Georgia became independent, to what extent the use of the notions of trauma and triumph are appropriate for Georgia, and whether the reality of the 1990s can be assessed as the trauma of victory. We believe that fiction and memoirs play a major role in constructing an event as a cultural trauma. On the one hand, literary texts determine the meaning of an event and shape it as a trauma and on the other hand, narration is an important method for overcoming a trauma. A trauma can be overcome through constantly conceptualizing and analyzing it, not through repression and hushing.

Key words: Georgia, trauma, triumph, literary texts.

A human is a narrator by nature. Narration implies not only description, but also interpretation. Deliberately or accidentally, meanings are attached to things, facts, and events that took place in the past. According to Robert Neimeyer, both narrators and audiences do so.³ If no texts depicting an event are created, they will not become a collective trauma no matter how tragic the event may be, as it is never the past itself that acts upon a present society, but representations of past events that are created, circulated and received within a specific cultural frame and political constellation.⁴

¹ This work was supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (grant N FR-18-3459).

² Umberto Eco, "Afterword for "The Name of the Rose," Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*. Georgian translation by Khatuna Tskhadadze (Tbilisi: Diogene, 2016), 693.

³ Robert A Neimeyer, "Re-Storying Loss: Fostering Growth in the Posttraumatic Narrative," *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth. Research and Practice*, eds. Lawrence G. Calhoun and Richard G. Tedeschi (New York: Routledge, 2006), 73-75.

⁴ Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt, "Memory and Political Change: Introduction," *Memory and Political Change*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3-4.



Fictional texts and texts published in the media, public speeches by politicians, celebrities, or unknown people, official documents, documentary movies and footage, poems, songs, and various types of artistic products and narratives are constantly discussed and interpreted, moving from one text to another. If a work on this issue wins recognition like, for example, Otar Chiladze's "Avelum," Aka Morchiladze's "Mamluk," or Archil Kikodze's "Southern Elephant," reading it will never end. It will not only find a place on the dusty shelves of libraries, but also will pass from hand to hand like in a relay race, becoming a subject of constant conceptualization.

Literary texts, with their ability to fictionalize and symbolize, can bring to life the experience which otherwise would be hardly verbalized and comprehended. They "have the potential to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand, and critical reflection on the other."⁵

As Umberto Eco says, the creation of a literary text is a cosmological event like the story in Genesis. "The first thing to do is to create a universe and make it as comfortable as possible, taking even minor issues into account."⁶ To "create" an artistic "universe", it is necessary to have in-depth knowledge of the era to be described. It is necessary to know where people lived and how they lived, what they felt, what made them happy, what pained them, why they loved, why they hated, what they talked and thought about and how, what they ate, what they read, what they listened to, what they watched, and what they created and why. Creating a universe implies introducing rules, laws, and rules of the game, which apply to characters as well as the plot and, what is most important, the narration. The events of the 1990s, which had an innate potential to be shaped as a trauma, determine the narration. Incessant repetition of the narrations by various authors shapes the event as a cultural trauma and represents a means for overcoming it. The storyline and the behavior of characters depend on the rules and laws of the universe created by the author, but not on the desire of the author.

In our case, the universe created in/by literary texts is a reflection of the 1990s and is full of the features of that period. Therefore, even when the author wants to "write a fairy tale, the adventure of two joyful boys"⁷ from Vake and Vere,⁸ the story nevertheless proves to be aggressive, which is due to the rules of the "created universe" and stems from the stressful and traumatic nature of the era to be described.

⁵ Christa Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 29.

⁶ Eco, "Afterword for 'The Name of the Rose,'" 701.

⁷ Aka Morchiladze, *Journey to Karabakh [მოგზაურობა ყარაბაღში]* (Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, 2017), 6.

⁸ Districts of central Tbilisi.

The authors of the works on the 1990s continue to have clear-cut and acute emotional links to the era they are writing about. The events are assessed and given meanings, and the assessments already given are revised or reinterpreted in the literature at this moment. It is possible to constantly continue revision, but the main nucleus of meanings is created in conditions when communicative memory still exists. Our objective is to outline precisely this nucleus. The objective of most fictional works and the main thing they have to say is not just to describe this era. However, writing about any issue – love, freedom, friendship, authors cannot avoid major events of the 1990s. Moreover, the rules of the game depicted in the literary texts are prompted exactly by these events. The main rules of the game of the era are under observation and hence, those of Eco’s “created worlds” fit the trauma-triumph paradigm. Therefore, the trauma-triumph of the 1990s determines the form and content of any text written about it.

We selected materials on the basis of Jeffrey Alexander’s features of the narratives reflecting collective traumas: A narrative is to depict an event and show what happened; clearly identify the victimized group; show that the traumatic event made an impact not only on one group, but also on the whole society; and point to a perpetrator, who is to be held responsible for what has happened.⁹

The selected texts are works not only recognized by critics, but also by readers’ interests. Many of them have been awarded various literary prizes: Lasha Bughadze’s “Small Country” and Iva Pezuashvili’s “Bunker” have been awarded “Saba” prize; Aka Morchiladze’s “Mameluke” and Archil Kikodze’s “Southern Elephant” – the prize of Ilia State University. Nino Kharatishvili’s “Eighth Life for Brilka” is recognized worldwide. In 1998, Otari Chiladze was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. The literary texts under analysis have been published several times. Some of them have turned into films (“A Trip to Karabakh,” “I Think I Will Die Without You”), while others have been staged (“Paliashvili Street Dogs”). Therefore, their impact on shaping collective memory and constructing traumas was quite strong. They have been created since 1989 up to now and show the dynamics of the narrative. In addition, the scene is laid in the works not only in the center of the capital and small towns, but also in the villages in the periphery, which enables us to realize what the center and regions have in common and what differences between them exist from the perspective of the attitudes towards the events studied.

The selected texts play an important role in the construction of trauma. In the process of narration, the components of the narrative find a consistent form; shared meanings are encoded in them. Through them, social

⁹ Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), 53.



trauma acquires shape while society has the opportunity to discover and overcome it. Prose and poetic works are interesting for our research. Authors of the texts represent different generations and accordingly, their representations and assessments differ. Temporal distance from the events has had an impact on the representation of traumatic experiences. Works written in the heat of the moment are full of linguistic and emotional expressions common during the event. Works produced later, on the other hand, stand out with their “sober” style and plots produced as a result of conscious reasoning.

The Chronotops of the 1990s

*Happy families are all alike;
every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*¹⁰

Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*.

This subchapter is about Georgia that is “unhappy in its own way.” The last years of the 20th century are referred to as the 90s, which has become a notorious term and notion. When mentioned, no one needs to specify, which century they belong to. The 90s encompass the events that have taken shape as a cultural trauma. This is not just a historical era, but first and foremost Eco’s “created world” – a unity of and interrelation between time, space, and actions depicted, interpreted, and represented. Only stressful events determine and set bounds of its limits, the artistic time of texts, and the space.

The creation of Eco’s universe implies that it is correctly arranged and minor things and seemingly insignificant details are taken into account. The artistic time and space, physical environment, scenery, and urban landscape create the aura of an imaginary universe. It ushers you in the text, makes you feel the rhythm and nature of time and the prospects for the storyline that is to unfold. However, the aura of the 90s is stressful. In the 90s, people love, are born, feel happy, laugh, get married, and become friends, but all this takes place in a stressful environment. The traumatic aura is the ether of this universe and a living force that shapes everything. Stress and trauma are the invisible starting point that creates everything and puts everything in order and in its due place.

A new era started and a new reality was shaped in the 1990s. Saying this, we first and foremost imply changes that started in attitudes and perceptions, not only in political, economic, and social aspects. These sudden changes can better be seen in the texts produced by news agencies, as they enable us to see everything according to precise dates. As regards fictional texts, they show things from their own angle, using symbols.

¹⁰ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*. English translation by Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, 1920), <https://bit.ly/3rQp9Qz> (Accessed 25.07.2021).

Before the 1990s, the word “mziuri” (“sunny” in Georgian) was an artistic symbol of Georgian reality. It reflected light, warmth, and happiness.¹¹ Others thought everything necessary for happiness was available here and Georgians were proud of this too. The song “Tbiliso” became not only the anthem of Tbilisi, but also an all-union hit.¹² It clearly shows the attitude towards Georgia in the Soviet times: a happy and pure region of the sun and roses, where it is agreeable to live. What was the Soviet Mziuri, a region comparable to “the sun and roses,” transformed into in the 1990s? How is the environment of the era described and what symbols are used to depict it? What changes are made to the language used to perceive and depict the universe? Even spring, which is a symbol of renovation and happiness, can undergo sharp changes in the language that becomes traumatic.

Trauma as the ether of the era also determines the meaning of snow as a symbol, making it negative. “There was a big fall of snow. The whole neighborhood was covered in such a manner that one would think the spring would never come and the snow frozen to the asphalt would never melt. The wind was blowing, driving the snow.”¹³ Snow implies cold here. The 1990s were a cold and numb universe. This story by Beka Kurkhuli, where the theme is to unfold “in the dark streets of Tbilisi full of criminals,” starts with the description of a cold environment. The girl, who was strolling in the Vere cemetery at midnight, was not afraid of the submachine gun rounds moving across the sky hanging over Tbilisi. The boy always carried in his pocket a Navajo – a Spanish knife with blade stabilizer and a symbol of revenge, which “Culinary Brotherhood members¹⁴ presented him with at the school banquet on 24 October 1992, shortly before they killed each other the same night.”¹⁵ The story about love and relations between a girl and a boy of the 1990 generation unfolds in a traumatic environment.

¹¹ Children’s pop group Mziuri founded in the 1970s was an ensemble of joyful, happy, and talented *pioneers* (members of the children’s Communist organization) from the sunny region of the Soviet Union. A documentary bearing the same name was made in 1973. There was also a children’s camp called Mziuri, a park of recreation and culture in the Vere Valley in Tbilisi (opened in 1982). On this topic see: Bela Tsipuria, *The Georgian Text in the Soviet/Post-Soviet/Post-Modern Context* [ქართული ტექსტი საბჭოთა/პოსტსაბჭოთა/პოსტმოდერნულ კონტექსტში] (Tbilisi: Ilia State University Press, 2016), 99.

¹² Music by Revaz Lagidze, lyrics by Petre Gruzinsky. The song was written for a film made in 1959 devoted to the 1500th anniversary of Tbilisi. In 1974, the well-known Melodia Soviet record company produced two phonograph records of the Orera pop group, which included “Tbiliso [თბილისი].” This made the song popular throughout the Soviet Union. In 1976, Nani Bregvadze sang it at the Song-76 festival.

¹³ Beka Kurkhuli, “City in the Snow [ქალაქი თოვლში],” Beka Kurkhuli, *City in the Snow* [ქალაქი თოვლში] (Tbilisi: Siesta, 2013), 70.

¹⁴ The Culinary Brotherhood – an armed criminal group in a neighborhood in Tbilisi, in the 1990s.

¹⁵ Kurkhuli, “City in the Snow [ქალაქი თოვლში],” 83.



A sudden and radical transformation of the epoch and the language of its perception is a characteristic feature of cultural trauma. Jeffrey Alexander defines cultural trauma as a state caused by a sudden and radical change in the social environment.¹⁶ When describing trauma of victory, Piotr Sztompka speaks about speedy and radical change with an unexpected and shocking effect.¹⁷ Description of an altered, stressful environment is permanently repeated in diverse texts, which proves that the society described by the author is shocked as a result of a sudden change. Such texts transformed into traumatic narratives that play an important role in attaching meanings to events and developing collective memory:

“The Mtatsminda ridge was cleft,
So was Makhata,
And the stony land in Nadzaladevi.
Avenues, streets, and squares were cleft.
It would be unfortunate, if Mount Mtatsminda would be cleft
And the nation dispersed.”¹⁸

“The antediluvian trolley-buses, so old that they list to one side, vibrate as they splash through torrents of sewage. The potholes are full of foul, foaming water of unspeakable origin. The pavements are strewn with drowned rats, their bellies bloated, their legs splayed.”¹⁹

“But it is better to stay at home at midnight, it is better to be at home trembling like a rabbit in a concrete warren. [...] If you go outside at night these days, you are either an idiot, or you no longer care about yourself. In any case, you have first to accept the idea that every time you leave the house, it may be the last time.”²⁰

“The war had just ended in Tbilisi at that time. The wrecked and miserable city, shrouded in smoke, was full of bread queues and plenty of unfortunate things.”²¹

“It was better to stay at one place than to move, because movement was dangerous.”²²

“Our country was speeding ahead to an abyss.”²³

¹⁶ Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 1-2.

¹⁷ Sztompka, “The Trauma of Social Change,” 158-159.

¹⁸ Otar Chkheidze, *Artistic Revolution [არტისტული გადატრიალება]* (Tbilisi: Lomisi, 2002), 58.

¹⁹ Chiladze, *Avelum*. English Translation by Donald Rayfield (Garnett Press, 2013), *Saba Library* (pages are not indicated in the electronic version offered by Saba Library), <https://bit.ly/3IIyocD> (Accessed 15.07.2021).

²⁰ Chiladze, *Avelum*, 86.

²¹ Aka Morchiladze, *Mamluk [მამლოქი]* (Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, 2019), 89.

²² Lasha Bugadze, *The Small Country [პატარა ქვეყანა]* (Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, 2018), 52.

²³ Nino Haratischwili, *The Eighth Life (for Brilka) [მერვე სიცოცხლე (ბრილკას)]*. Georgian translation Nino Burduli (Tbilisi: Intelekti, 2019), 1018.

“German, Czech, and Chinese crockery cared for with so much love and suffering moved from the cupboards in living-rooms to the black market on the ‘dry bridge.’”²⁴

“I also went around many other places - robbed buildings of plants, empty schools, and closed printing houses.”²⁵

“We no longer paid any attention to news reports on thefts, robberies, and murders. We were happy to be alive at the end of the day.”²⁶

“We became accustomed to everything.”²⁷ “We had to live in a cruel reality.”²⁸

The excerpts are arranged chronologically in the line of ascent – from the 1990s to present. The 1990s seem equally traumatic at every stage. The language of narration is traumatic and the storyline unfolds in a traumatic environment. The excerpts describe traumatic environments, not concrete tragedies. This is a clear-cut representation of a cultural trauma constructed with fictional narratives repeated in various texts over the past thirty years.

Naira Gelashvili’s story “Grandma” is one of the best metaphors about the early 1990s. The excerpts quoted above say everything straightforwardly and almost realistically, while this text is a fable and it is the fable-like narration that makes it spellbinding.

“Grandma” is a fairy tale created on the basis of Georgian folk tales. This is a fairy tale about fairy tales and the text is full of symbols and cultural patterns. There would have been nothing special and prominent for the purposes of our research in the story without its date: the story was written in 1991. The date at the end of the story is a kind of brand label and to understand it, you are obliged to take a look at history and make the year 1991 a paradigm for understanding the story. Such an approach points to the traumatic nature of those years, because mentioning the 1990s thirty years later puts you within a kind of frame and restrains you, prompting to see everything within the paradigm of a cultural trauma and make generalizations from this angle.

Important passages in the text give us the impetus to conceptualize the 1990s as a metaphor. The author seems to very precisely describe the environment, where the theme unfolds in the fairy tale. “The black water welters from the side of the cemetery, flowing along the graves.” [...] “Although there is no forest, so there can be no deer, the Zoo is here... Does this river also flow down there?”²⁹ Literary

²⁴ Haratischwili, *The Eighth Life*, 1019.

²⁵ Haratischwili, *The Eighth Life*, 1022.

²⁶ Haratischwili, *The Eighth Life*, 1050.

²⁷ Haratischwili, *The Eighth Life*, 1050.

²⁸ Haratischwili, *The Eighth Life*, 1051.

²⁹ Naira Gelashvili, “Grandma [დიდედა],” *Georgian Alternative Prose. Naira Gelashvili [ქართული ალტერნატიული პროზა. ნაირა გელაშვილი]* (Tbilisi: Karchkhadze Publishing, 2016), 214.



critic Levan Bregadze said that “the readers, who know Tbilisi, will definitely understand that it is about the Vere River and its valley.”³⁰ In other words, “the outlines of a real environment and an existent locus can be seen in the fairy tale.” The literary critic says that the writer lives not far from the Vere valley indeed. Therefore, “I have seen from the window many times”³¹ is also a documentary detail in the fairy tale. Movement from real to unreal, from abstract to concrete, and from imaginary to documentary is characteristic of post-modernist texts, particularly if a text comprises such clear-cut allusions.

“Lice have appeared in our city. Children have them. They are spread all over nursery schools and boarding schools. It was a genuine calamity for their mothers, who were already quite exhausted.”³² In addition to local residents, lice also attack characters of Georgian folk tales. The situation becomes so grave that the characters of the fairy tale, who can work miracles, are stunned, saying: “So strange! For some reason, nothing works any longer – neither the magic jewel nor the magic shirt. What country is this?”³³ “The art of poisoning the whole river and vineyard is unmatched! Some other country seems to have decided to kill everyone in this kingdom!”³⁴ If we judge according to cultural patterns, it is possible to transform imaginary and fabulous symbols found in the text into documentary details, as both the river and vineyard are symbols of Georgia. Although this country has a long line of the sea coast, rivers are much more important in Georgian culture and not only in fairy tales, but also in literature (“Letters of a Traveler” by Ilia Chavchavadze, the generation of authors of the 1860s in general, “Thoughts on the Riverside of Mtkvari” by Nikoloz Baratashvili, and so forth), and vine is one of the main symbols of the Georgian culture and Georgia. The guardian of the vineyard – “the dead white dog” – is also symbolic. The characters of the fairy tale are unable to revive it. The Georgian mountain guard dog – Tarti, also called shepherd and Kazbegura – is white. In addition, its point of origin and habitat is exactly where the main border between Russia and Georgia lies and it also crosses a river in the mountains – the Tergi.

By means of cultural patterns – images deeply rooted in the society – the author attaches significance to events and makes the reader perceive a tale as a fable-like narrative of reality.³⁵

³⁰ According to Levan Bregadze, the story predicts the tragedy of 13 June 2015 in Tbilisi, caused by the swelled up Vere River.

³¹ Levan Bregadze, “A Fairy Tale about Fairy Tales and Prophetic too [ზღაპარი ზღაპრებზე - თანაც წინასწარმეტყველური!],” Levan Bregadze, *Postmodernism in Georgian Literature [პოსტმოდერნიზმი ქართულ მწერლობაში]* (Tbilisi: Artanuji, 2020), 132.

³² Gelashvili, “Grandma [დიდედა],” 194.

³³ Gelashvili, “Grandma,” 210.

³⁴ Gelashvili, “Grandma,” 212.

³⁵ Assmann, “Impact and Resonance,” 44.

If we paraphrase the title of Svante Cornell's remarkable book, it follows that the "kingdom" doomed to be exterminated is a symbol of a "small nation" ("kingdom" – Georgia), and the "state" that has this desire symbolizes a "great power" ("state" – Russia), which makes everything logical. This is the answer to one of the questions of the traumatic narrative: Who is the enemy?

And who is the grandma herself?

The grandma is very old – "almost 100 years old." She knows everything – fairy tales, legends, fables, proverbs, poems, and riddles. She can identify healing herbs, make sugar syrups and ointments, forecast weather, interpret dreams, and utter incantations. Characters of the fairy tale sit around the grandma, listening to her, because she is the main narrator and the characters of the fairy tale exist in the grandma's text. If the grandma does not speak, they will disappear, they will no longer exist, and the fabulous universe will also disappear. The grandma is the past not as something that has ended, but the past as a foundation and cornerstone, where we stand. It exists in the present and in the future too. It is the past that is the spine of the wholeness and unity of culture, time, and space.

There are daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law of the daughters-in-law. Can they be symbols of the Soviet present? They remove lice from children, but they have no time to take care of grandma's long hair. Grandma is against shaving her hair off and daughters-in-law evict her to the wooden house on the small land plot at some distance from the house.

And there is a great-grandchild – a symbol of the future.

The several generations are a metaphor of the wholeness of Georgian reality. The invasion of lice (probably Soviet reality?) ruined the wholeness, but failed to make it disappear, because the great-grandchild longs to see the grandma. The child looks at her through the window, but they cannot hear each other's voices. There is no link. However, the child can see her and is worried, yearning to go and see her.

The grandma keeps silent. "Women are weeping... They comb their hair and weep... Men and horses are nervous."³⁶ These are documentary details of the 1990s turned into a fairy tale. It is a description of the 1990s, because everyone minded their own business then – men were nervous and dying, and women wept.

"I am looking at the heavens. A dark cloud is moving from the edge of the sky. It is a city with towers and aircraft rather than a cloud. Although I am glad that such an excellent and stunning cloud appeared for the first time in this city after my childhood, I note with fear that this cloud also emits some strange blackness, becoming increasingly dark."³⁷ This is also a description of reality. These

³⁶ Gelashvili, "Grandma", 209.

³⁷ Gelashvili, "Grandma", 203.



are documentary details. The author was born in 1947 and March 9 took place in her childhood. This may be a parallel. Representation of the relation between earlier and later events, the resonance of paradigmatic events, when an earlier fact subconsciously forms a later one.³⁸ This black cloud may be the desire of freedom and therefore, its appearance is dangerous and at the same time very joyful. Recalling Neimeyer,³⁹ the black cloud may be a symbol of a triumphal trauma of the 1990s revived by April 9 and a fable told on March 9.

In addition, we encounter clear artistic allusions in the text: Mother asks: "Can deer milk help?" and the child answers: "Can the milk of the deer kept in the cage help?" This is a symbol of freedom and the desire of freedom at the beginning of the 1990s.

The storyline reaches the culmination. "The river has overflowed its banks, turning everything into a swamp."⁴⁰ No way out can be seen any longer, but the threat can be seen from the waist up.

And the child decides everything.

It is not the mother's experience that decides, but the faith of the child - the "fabulous" love and great desire to rescue the grandma and bring her back. The child has trust in fairy tales and miracles. He uses a crystal bead from the magic family light fixture as a magic jewel, which turns him into a lamb, who runs over the waves of the river and makes Murman, who ruined the love between Abesalom and Eteri,⁴¹ say the magic words. As a result, the heavy waves of the river (a symbol of new times) take away the lice (a symbol of Soviet reality) and save, using the magic carpet, the grandma and the characters of the fairy tale sitting around her. "He is holding the grandma by her hand and they are by the river now... They will cross it now and we will go home."⁴² The fairy tale was written in 1991. It is full of symbols characteristic of Georgian culture. The end of a fairy tale should be happy. This is a reality perceived and seen in 1991. It is a story about a black cloud that has just emerged and that is joyful and dangerous at the same time and the story should also have a happy end. The text is a fabulous representation of a triumphal trauma.

The description of the stressful and melancholic environment is not due to the style of a concrete author, but to the traumatic nature of the era. It is equally stressful with any author writing about the 90s. In 2020, Iva Pezuashvili published

³⁸ Assmann, "Impact and Resonance," 45.

³⁹ Neimeyer, "Re-Storying Loss," 73-75.

⁴⁰ Gelashvili, "Grandma," 215.

⁴¹ Characters of the medieval Georgian folk poem "Eteriani."

⁴² Gelashvili, "Grandma," 213.

a small-size novel “Bunker.”⁴³ The multi-story buildings, constructed in the late Soviet period, had built-in garbage bunkers from which a stinking smell spread through the entrances and floors. The author used the bunker as a symbol of the recent past and thus revived the epoch of the 90s from the perspective of the year 2017: the 90s were a period in which the environment was as putrid as a garbage bunker. Shota Iatashvili entitled his story “The Sick City” and dated it January-March 1992. Like the date of Naira Gelashvili’s “Grandma,” this also becomes a paradigm of understanding the text. Tbilisi was indeed a “sick city” in January-March 1992. What does Iatashvili’s world of the 90s look like? “I live in a sick city. [...] It is almost impossible to get out of the sick city. [...] No one needs sick people beyond the boundaries of the city.” Young women queuing up to buy food discuss having sex with five males at the same time; a woman and a man quarrel in the queue; the man fires a gunshot; a person breaks in with a hand grenade and takes canned food with him; “cockroach jam” and “canned mice” are the main food. There is only stress in the city, not life: “A monster with houses with broken windows, canons, one-armed and one-legged men, raped women, brains mixed up with blood, crumpled paper with ‘spring will no longer come’ written on it, a depraved sister, whom her husband with cold eyes cuts the throat, canned mice, protesters, who fire submachine gun rounds in the air, a poet, who sells condoms instead of books... The monster called my city was coming.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, there is hope. There are a lot of flowers in the city. Although no one can notice them, there is a man – “a Methuselah, who is as old as the city, “who notices them, collects them, and sings an “extremely beautiful and extremely everlasting song.”

“Avelum” by Otar Chiladze is also a metaphor of the 1990s. Two empires are breaking down. One is the Soviet Empire and the other one is an imaginary empire – “Avelum’s own or, to be more correct, the empire of love that exists only for him, being hidden in his heart.”⁴⁵ According to literary critic Manana Kvachantiradze, the reasons for the trauma of the 1990s are as follows: “The reverberating coincidence of the empires of evil and love; convergence of the personal and imperial disasters, which leads to the overall transgression of destruction at all levels; and the disappearance of one of the opposed pairs, which bodes the disappearance of the other.”⁴⁶ This empire consists of women: wife, daughter, granddaughter, and two mistresses - one of French and the other one of Russian nationality. This empire

⁴³ Iva Pezuashvili, *Bunker* (Tbilisi. “Intelekti” Publishing house, 2020).

⁴⁴ Shota Iatashvili, “The Sick City [ავადმყოფი ქალაქი],” Shota Iatashvili, *Attraction [მიზიდულობა]* (Tbilisi: Palitra, L, 2012), 87.

⁴⁵ Chiladze, *Avelum*.

⁴⁶ Tamaz Kvachantiradze, “The First Year [წელი პირველი],” *Literaturuli sakartvelo*, 13 აპრილი, 1990, Nr. 15, 65.



of Avelum is a metaphor of Georgia with its various manifestations. The wife symbolizes the past of Georgia, the daughter – the 1990s, and the granddaughter – the future. The French woman symbolizes Georgia's attitude towards Europe and the Russian – towards Russia. Both empires break down, because the transitional period leads to changes in approaches, attitudes, and perceptions. The “empire of love” is a kind of symbol of identity; therefore, its destruction is painful for him.

What does the description of the 90s in literature consist of and what are the events that are described and when did they unfold and where? It does not start either with the Tbilisi War in 1991 or April 9, 1989. These two main tragic events revive and become attached to earlier events. Therefore, the beginning of the reality of the 1990s in literature is linked to other tragic events that took place at other times and in other spaces.

War in Afghanistan – 1979-1989;
Chernobyl catastrophe – 26 April 1986;
Natural disaster in Svaneti – 1987;
Spitak earthquake – 7 December 1988;
Natural disaster in Ajaria – 1989;
Karabakh conflict – from 1988;
Ceașescu's execution – 1989;
War in Yugoslavia – from 1991.

This is the list of the events, which are at the beginning of the narrations or storylines about the 90s or are part of the content of the texts. These are a kind of components of the 90s, where actions, times, and spaces are all traumatic.

In addition to the present time described in the texts, the past of the artistic time is also interesting:

March 9, 1956;
Soviet repressions;
Sovietization.

Trauma of victory of the 90s plays the role of resonance, linking the earlier and later events and keeping alive the traumatic experience of the past.⁴⁷ The time, space, and action are also confined to tragic events in this case.

In addition to the major spaces that set bounds on the “world,” the texts comprise place names that represent a kind of scene, where the 90s unfold as an event. These place names have by themselves acquired a traumatic-triumphal meaning as a constituent part of the whole “world.” Names taken separately probably do not mean anything and cannot tell us anything, but if we list them together, a narrative will take shape:

⁴⁷ Assmann, “Impact and Resonance,” 45.

Likhni;
Tbilisi State University;
Rustaveli Avenue;
Area in front of the Parliament.
Kashveti.

This is already a narrative and a kind of an associative game. These place names require almost nothing to bring the scene to life on April 9, 1989.

Cinema House;
Stairs outside TV;
Rkoni;
Tbilisi Sea;
Area in front of the Parliament;
“Tbilisi” Hotel;
Kashveti;
Bunker;
Didube Metro station;
Circus;
Chelyuskinites Bridge;
Samegrelo.

This is also a narrative. These words do not need additional explanations to recollect the scenes of the Tbilisi War and civil confrontation.

Rallies;
National;
Long live!
Down with!
KGB agent;
Putsch;
Mkhedrioni;
Guard;
Criminogenic situation.

These are some of the words, which trigger associations with the 90s.

Let us go back to Eco: “In the Middle Ages, cathedrals and monasteries used to burn like twigs, so stories of those times without fires is the same as a movie about a war without flaming planes.”⁴⁸ The same is true for us. The world of the 90s does not exist without these components. It is “obligatory” to use these components, when you write about the 1990s. Otherwise, it is impossible to create the world of the 1990s.

⁴⁸ Eco, “Afterword for ‘The Name of the Rose,’” 707.



The main character of Aka Morchiladze's "Mamluk" is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. The main character of "Escape from Paradise" by Beka Kurkhuli also arrives from Afghanistan and the text comprises a long narration about that country. This seems to be natural, as Afghanistan is the first battlefield, where the generation of the 90s saw bloodshed, which never ended in their future lives, befalling on them in the shape of the Tbilisi War and civil confrontation, the wars in Tskhinvali, and Abkhazia, score-settling in the streets, and senseless wars between brotherhoods. Iva Pezuashvili's "Bunker" is a saga of the Simonyan family who have fled from Karabakh to Tbilisi during the war. In "Avelum" by Otar Chiladze, natural disasters are often mentioned before the narration of the main story starts, which is associated with the hardships of the transitional period, because at the beginning, the author speaks about the lack of hope for the future, fears, and the end of the world: "Really, the end of the world is coming. The death of big things begins with the death of little things. In this case, true, we are dealing more with a case of suicide rather than death from natural causes."⁴⁹ This judgment similar to "The Decline of the West" by Oswald Spengler is followed by a story of Georgia: "Already ten meters of red snow had covered Svaneti. [...] December earthquake shook the whole of Georgia and put it in jeopardy. "At the beginning of the same work, the author starts setting bounds on the space and installing decorations, where the storyline is to unfold later and he definitely has to present the space as a stressful environment, so the author uses the Chernobyl tragedy as one of the components: „Several forms of Chernobyl flu are simultaneously raging in the most beautiful of the cities of the Caucasus."⁵⁰

The geography and the contemplative space of the war are further expanded in a Georgian story narrated in German by Nino Haratischwili. "We noiselessly walked around this war, closing eyes. And when we had electricity, we watched footage of the war in Yugoslavia on TV. Strange as it was, our hearts bled for the war of others. Moreover, we were grateful that we had the opportunity to forget our own war. We had to live in a cruel reality."⁵¹

In his book "Tearful Glasses", Gogi Gvakharia starts his narration on April 9 with the story of Ceaușescu. "They filmed everything, how they put the couple up against a wall and how they shot them."⁵²

⁴⁹ Chiladze, *Avelum*.

⁵⁰ Chiladze, *Avelum*, 5.

⁵¹ Haratischwili, *The Eighth Life*, 1051.

⁵² Gogi Gvakharia, *Tearful Glasses* [ცრემლიანი სათვალები] (Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, 2013), 216.

Stories also mention calm places in the world. For example, Aka Morchiladze's story "Dogs of Paliashvili Street" starts in the following manner: "I want to go to Nice."⁵³ This also points to a trauma, because Nice symbolizes beating one's way out of the locked, dark, and traumatic space and finding a calm place to relax: "I don't know what it was, probably a dream... Otherwise, how could I have recalled Nice in this darkness: There was no electricity at night and there is no electricity now either, in the morning."⁵⁴ It is the inaccessible and idyllic place that is beyond the real space, and the real space is dark and cold. Aka Morchiladze describes it sarcastically: "The scene is fantastic – pants and a candle. In short, whether you wash or not, you resemble a dimwit. All of us have elongated ugly mugs. It is such a time. It is the classical time of becoming dimwits."⁵⁵ Cold is an important symbol of the 90s. It is so important that a joke became widespread throughout Georgia: "Those of us, who survive this winter, will make a joint photo with the inscription "Georgia" on it".

In addition to what the joke mingled with sarcasm says, the period was bloody. Time could change nothing in the environment. In this story too, it is frozen in blood, but this is the blood of criminal score-settling, not that of war. When you read the description of life of stray dogs living in ravines and forests, their running around to find food, treating passersby as enemies, killing them as well as each other, and terrifying the city day and night in the story, you can clearly imagine Tbilisi and the entire Georgia of the 90s that lived according to the rules of brotherhoods. This happened in independent Georgia, where the only thing acquaintances discussed was that "no one has been killed or robbed in the neighborhood over the past two or three days."⁵⁶

The language is not melancholic and pessimistic because of the fact that the story is written in the 1990s. With a good author, a language automatically becomes such as soon as he starts telling his story about a specific era. The story "Zinka Adamiani" was written quite recently, in the second decade of the 21st century. Literary critic Levan Tsagareli says that it is a story-requiem, which becomes evident from the very beginning.⁵⁷ The author dedicated the book to the friends of her mother, "beautiful girls, who remain in the 20th century."⁵⁸ Telling

⁵³ Aka Morchiladze, *Dogs of Paliashvili Street* [ფალიაშვილის ქუჩის ძაღლები] (Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, 2017), 3.

⁵⁴ Morchiladze, *Dogs of Paliashvili Street*, 3.

⁵⁵ Morchiladze, *Dogs of Paliashvili Street*, 4.

⁵⁶ Morchiladze, *Dogs of Paliashvili Street*, 9.

⁵⁷ "Zinka Adamiani" - Levan Tsagareli [“ზინკა ადამიანი” - ლევან ცაგარელი], *YouTube*, March 28, 2019, <https://bit.ly/334Ixxr> (Accessed 02.02.2021).

⁵⁸ Ana Kordzaia-Samadashvili, *Zinka Adamiani* [ზინკა ადამიანი] (Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, 2019), 152.



the tragic and fabulous story of people residing in so-called “Italian-type” yards in Tbilisi, the author revives true stories of Tbilisi of the late 20th century. In addition to personal tragedies and sentiments of these people, it is also interesting that the environment as a whole is stressful. It is so stressful that although you are aware from the very beginning what kind of text you are dealing with, the shocking story nevertheless unexpectedly breaks out on you: “Nothing will end and nothing will be brought in order, Zinka. Temiko and Zuriko are no longer in this world. [...] At dawn next day after the boys were buried, smoothly shaven and overdressed Data with a medal on his chest killed himself with his service weapon.”⁵⁹ Why were Temiko and Zuriko killed? Why did Data commit suicide? The 90s are the reason again.

Unlike other texts, this one does not mention dates or point to any streets and names. However, the space of the 90s is nevertheless determined and marked by epigraphs under the subchapters:

“Shavleg, your black tunic, Shavleg...” – an excerpt from a song that is a symbol of April 9;

“Light is back” – from the reality of the 90s;

“I want to go to Nice” – the expression of the desire to beat one’s way out of the stressful space of the 90s described by Aka Morchiladze;

“I will buy everything old with the exception of your grandmother” – life in need.

Components of the 1990s can be found not only in epigraphs. They are scattered in the text:

“After Zaur put his Moskvich on bricks and said loudly: ‘That’s it!’ grandpa and Zinka saw from the balcony on one very cold day that smoke flew up into the air somewhere. This was not the mushroom Zinka longed for. The city, the heart was burning”⁶⁰ – crime and the Tbilisi War;

“He had the opportunity to see tanks and also had the opportunity of surviving the curfew, but he had no fears. But now he was afraid of the end too”⁶¹ – April 9 and the Tbilisi War;

“This winter will never end and the war will never end either”⁶² – the Tbilisi War.

One of the first literary reflections of the 1990s belongs to Aka Morchiladze – “Journey to Karabakh.” The film adaptation of the novel was called “A Trip to Karabakh,” which reinforces the emphasis on the abnormality of the era, as the

⁵⁹ Kordzaia-Samadashvili, *Zinka Adamiani*, 78.

⁶⁰ Kordzaia-Samadashvili, *Zinka Adamiani*, 71.

⁶¹ Kordzaia-Samadashvili, *Zinka Adamiani*, 71.

⁶² Kordzaia-Samadashvili, *Zinka Adamiani*, 122.

title becomes more ironic and sarcastic: “A Trip to Karabakh,” i.e., a trip to war. The space described in the novel is enclosed by the war and is full of negative energy. The “world” is represented only in the spaces, where there is war. And the time seems to be standing still and immovable. It is not felt to be changing. It neither changes nor can change anything. The time is stiffened and petrified in the war spread in the space.

The confusion of old and new values was not always so comical. The events on April 9, 1989 gave rise to fears of the future, nature, each other, and uncertainty. All this is clearly seen in texts, and differences depend on the narrators. The author is the narrator in Lasha Bugadze’s novel “The Small Country.” The novel is autobiographic and it can be said that the author is telling the story of his childhood in the 90s. He tells the story not as an adult, but as a child, who saw and perceived things in 1989. He writes: “My first major fear is April 9.”⁶³ He focuses on the media showing mutilated corpses, noting that no one thought about the minds of children at that time. The fact that the exalted masses constantly go to the mortuaries, obsessed with the desire to see corpses, he regards as a widespread fear. “Show us the dead.”⁶⁴ Gogi Gvakharia said the same, when he wrote that the main artistic image of 1989 was the close view of the girls and boys killed and mutilated on April 9.⁶⁵ In his novel “Avelum,” Otar Chiladze speaks about fears of novelty and uncertainty. “All my life I’ve been waiting for the day which I have lived to see and... I’m afraid!”⁶⁶ It is this dangerous environment emptied of any hopes for the future and full of a pessimistic aura that is described in the introductory part of the novel. The author often speaks about the end of the world, which can be explained by expectations of changes in the 1990s. The fear of uncertainty is so strong, natural disasters, wars, criminal score-settling, and murders are so frequent, and changes are so swift that a space emerges at the end of the 20th century for fortune tellers, soothsayers, psychic mediums, aliens, or those, who have seen the latter. A fortune telling gypsy and psychic medium can also be encountered in “Avelum.” It is they who can “instantly (for just twenty kopecks) lead you out of the fog of uncertainty and ‘tell’ you what to expect. But people are most afraid of such knowledge.”⁶⁷ Longo is a psychic medium and the whole Soviet Union is waiting for him to appear on TV.⁶⁸ Aliens are often discussed on TV and people live in this reality. Everything changes for the narrator, too, after

⁶³ Kordzaia-Samadashvili, *Zinka Adamiani*, 40.

⁶⁴ Kordzaia-Samadashvili, *Zinka Adamiani*, 48.

⁶⁵ Gvakharia, *Tearful Glasses*, 218.

⁶⁶ Chiladze, *Avelum*.

⁶⁷ Chiladze, *Avelum*, 6.

⁶⁸ Bugadze, *The Small Country*, 34.



April 9. A completely different reality starts taking shape: monuments, names of streets, icons of saints instead of Lenin's pictures, sounds of prayers and chants, banned movies on TV screens, and what is most important, "everything is allowed to everyone now."⁶⁹ "Hammer and sickle was finally evicted from the Georgian post-Modernist still-life art and 'Iluzioni' no longer showed good movies only on Christmas and Easter."⁷⁰

The importance of April 9 was based on the cultural pattern of Christ's resurrection: you need to be martyred to rise. Nothing could oppose the concept of great victory achieved by means of a sacrifice. The only alternative narrative offered by the Soviet government was immediately forgotten. At the first stage, Shevardnadze tried to diminish the importance of April 9, 1991 in order to make people forget Zviad Gamsakhurdia, but after he strengthened his power, he also used to emphasize the importance of the restoration of independence. However, it is noteworthy that the attitude of the first years nevertheless remains in the texts of the supporters of "Shevardnadze's narrative." For example, in her memoirs that appeared in 2003 and then, revised, in 2019, Lana Gogoberidze does not write much about April 9, 1991, when speaking about April 9, 1989, but recalls other periods in detail.

The narrative of resurrection was again enacted on April 9. Being a victim at the individual and collective levels is a part of the Georgian cultural pattern. There are two things that serve as a foundation, purpose, and basis for self-sacrifice – Homeland and God. Both are at the same level and are mutually connected.

"A drop of blood-colored poppy

Near Uplistsikhe

Is probably a messenger of blood to be shed,

Not the blood already shed..."⁷¹

Murman Lebanidze wrote this poem in 1971, which is much earlier than April 9, 1989. This is a kind of literary prophesy or premonition that is based on the cultural pattern of sacrifice, because blood is necessary to achieve freedom and great victory. It was women, who mostly fell on April 9. To determine the importance of this day, society resorted to another cultural pattern: woman and mother as Georgia's protector. Georgia is under the auspices of St. Mary, the most important woman in the Christian world; St. Nino, the person, who accomplished the most important deed for Georgia – Christianized it; St. Shushanik, the main

⁶⁹ Bugadze, *The Small Country*, 42.

⁷⁰ Gvakharia, *Tearful Glasses*, 225.

⁷¹ Murman Lebanidze, "Near Uplistsikhe [უფლისციხესთან]," Murman Lebanidze, *Works in Two Volumes*, vol. 1 (Tbilisi: Sabchota sakartvelo, 1989), 14.

character of the first Georgian literary work; and Ketevan, the queen martyred for her religion and homeland. The women, who fell on April 9, were identified precisely with these symbols.

From the next day after the April 9 tragedy, a number of attitudes were changed or clearly formulated. It was due to the April 9 trauma that the image of Russia as the enemy was reinforced and the perception was formulated in the following manner.

“Russia kills, as this word is synonymous to a natural disaster in Georgia. Russia means danger. [...] It is Russia’s plan; Russia has a hand in it; there is a Russian trace. Russia is a direct or indirect reason for Georgia’s misfortune; Russia is a resentful stepmother; there are seismic stations in Russia able to cause artificial earthquakes; Russian soldiers have no moral – they kill, rob, and rape. Russia is a killer.”⁷²

Changes in the attitude towards the past confirm this. People started actively talking about the tragic events in the past linked to Russia as a conqueror. April 9 put an end to the Soviet Union in the minds of Georgian society and transformed the idea of independence, which was not so widespread even on April 8, into a common Georgian idea.

April 9 as a paradigmatic event established a link between earlier and later happenings. One of the un-mourned traumas recalled from the past is March 9, 1956. The reason is not the similarity in content: on March 9, unlike April 9, there was a protest against criticism of Stalin’s cult of personality. These two events are connected due to the cultural pattern of sacrifice. The two tragedies occurred in the same place – Rustaveli Avenue. The perpetrator was the same – the Soviet Army. Thus, April 9 and March 9 have developed into a chain of traumatic events.

The story of the transformation of the events on March 9, 1956 unfolded precisely in the same manner as the first artistic texts written about it. This was, for example, “Revelation” by Otar Chkheidze written in 1973 and published only in 1989.⁷³ Another important text is a poem on March 9 by Simon Chikovani that became known to the public also after Georgia became independent. Narrators and listeners are needed to have an event transformed into a trauma. The narration is to be public, a discussion is to follow, and it is to be protracted in time. However, what happened to the March 9 tragedy is precisely what is said in the poem by Simon Chikovani: “They wounded me and shut my mouth last night.” It remained unspoken and failed to be transformed into a collective trauma. Public narration about March 9 started after April 9.

“And people forgot 9 March, equally doomed, equally unfortunate, led astray at that time too.”⁷⁴

⁷² Bugadze, *The Small Country*, 41.

⁷³ Tsipuria, *Georgian Text*, 189.

⁷⁴ Chkheidze, *Artistic Revolution*, 56.



“I don’t know why, but I’m horribly startled and alarmed by the indistinct pour and inarticulate shouts of a torrent of people merging into one great channel. [...] The time of testing is nigh. Nothing good will come of it. That’s how it was in 1956, too. That was how the city sheeted and boiled over then.”⁷⁵

“Unlike March 9, 1956, when people secretly took their dead and held modest burials, no one was afraid of anything on April 9, 1989.”⁷⁶

The tragedies of April 9 and March 9 became intertwined in literature and constructed as traumas in a single line. This process is clearly seen in “Avelum” by Otar Chiladze. The March 9 tragedy is described in detail in the text and the author constantly reverts to it in the novel. It is important that the author starts “arranging” the traumatic environment of the 90s with describing March 9. He introduces us into the novel’s traumatic space and time with the sharp description of this tragedy. A step before this, the author says in the novel: “Today, 1989 years after the physical incarnation of Son of God,” specifying the time of the novel. By narrating about March 9, he creates a stressful aura, preparing us for a tragic storyline.

In addition to reviving March 9, April 9 became a new paradigm for rethinking the past as a whole. Literary texts written after Georgia gained independence perceived the past in a different way.

In terms of recalling the past, there is an interesting episode in the story about Mikheil Javakhishvili and Beria in Archil Kikodze’s “Southern Elephant.” One of the main values of the book that is important for our research is that a story of one day is placed in the context of the centuries-old history of Georgia. The main character halts near a house in Kiacheli Street. The house belongs to Lavrenty Beria and overlooks Mikheil Javakhishvili’s house. Trees did not hinder the view at that time and “Beria could see the small house and its inhabitant, watching and observing him. [...] The grave of the writer is unknown as well as that of his executioner, but the two houses continue to stand one opposite the other, but there is no commemorative plaque on Beria’s house. My mother told me as a child that Beria lived there. She said that in such a manner that I retained this in my memory, although I had no idea who she was speaking about.” The main character recalls a semi-mythical story of relations between Beria and Javakhishvili. It is the transfer of such stories from the communicative memory to the cultural memory that transforms events into narratives of trauma or triumph. The description of the relations between Beria and Javakhishvili is a confrontation between good and evil. Beria is an “evil in the flesh,” who “needs as the air to breathe someone, who

⁷⁵ Chiladze, *Avelum*.

⁷⁶ Beka Kurkhuli, *Escape from Paradise [სამოთხიდან გაქცეულები]* (2015), *Saba Library* (pages are not indicated in the electronic version offered by Saba Library), <https://bit.ly/3r47R3y> (Accessed 02.04.2021).

he can play cat-and-mouse with and whom he will either allow to live or destroy.” Beria is a symbol of the enemy, i.e., a symbol of the one who created the traumatic past and who is responsible for the misfortune. Beria is a symbol of the group that is held responsible for the traumatic narrative. Beria wants to invite to lunch at his home “the thin-bodied and four-eyed writer,” who “has nothing for the exception of his own and others’ books”,⁷⁷ but the writer rejects the invitation. The main character supports the writer, who rejects the invitation of one of the most dangerous men in the world, which is equal to signing his own death sentence. Javakhishvili is aware of this, but he is unable to push himself to accept it, as “this is the last boundary and he will find it difficult to go on living beyond it.” The writer cannot go to the man, who needs his visit as yet another confirmation of his boundless power. This “fairy tale” has a bad end: Javakhishvili was taken from Kvishkheti.⁷⁸ He was to travel the road like any other person under repression. Mother tells the main character, and he reads elsewhere that Beria personally tortured Javakhishvili.

There is a very interesting passage in this segment. The main character is not sure whether the story of invitation his mother told him is true or not. In addition, she keeps constantly telling this and this constant narration is most significant, as it underscores that the event is of major importance. By doing so, mother tries to teach her son the difference between good and evil. “I do not know whether the invitation was indeed extended, but this is what my mother told me in half whisper, when I grew up a little and later, when it was not obligatory to whisper.” Not only the story is tragic, but the time is also presented as a tragedy – “the time of half- truths pronounced in half whisper.”⁷⁹ Such a metaphoric description of the period fully reflects the tragic nature of the era.

The fact that the Javakhishvili story was turned into a symbol of the era and was constantly narrated by different authors transforms it into a cultural trauma. The death of Mikheil Javakhishvili is a tragedy, but the narration and reconstruction transform the story into a myth that becomes triumphal, fitting the cultural pattern of “trampling down death by death” and telling us the story of a victory despite physical destruction. The narrator says: “It does not matter whether it is true or not, as it has already become the truth for me and I like the writer, who rejected the invitation by one of the most dangerous men in the world.” Reading the passage, readers feel not only sympathy, but also pride. “He put on a white suit and left together with them. His children could see for quite a long time their father in the

⁷⁷ Kikodze, *The Southern Elephant*, 144.

⁷⁸ Kvishkheti – a village in the Khashuri district of the Shida Kartli region. During the Soviet time, the summer residence for Georgian writers was located there.

⁷⁹ Kikodze, *The Southern Elephant*, 142-143.



white suit walking among the Chekists... A white spot walking among grey and black. [...] Pain, insults, and death awaited him. Those, who found no meaning in his or others' books at all, were going to torture and kill him. However, before they inflicted pain, besmeared him, and probably broke him, the only thing he could do was to confront them and put on the starched snow-white suit specially to offend their eyes."⁸⁰ You suffer, you pity him, and you sympathize with him, but the main sentiment that is above all is being proud of Javakhishvili's behavior: death is not a defeat. On the contrary, Javakhishvili, who was destroyed physically, won morally. It is also possible to draw parallels with hagiographic works. Javakhishvili is a martyr in the literal sense of the word, because he confirmed his faith, truth, and righteous path with his blood.

"The Eighth Life" by Nino Haratischvili, a classic example of a family romance, was perceived as a kind of historical fresco of "The Red Century." The upper middle-class family of Jashi from a provincial town in west Georgia (not Kutaisi) is the protagonist of the work.⁸¹

Although the memory depicted in the novel "lacks clarity in reflecting the spirit, flair, or uniting factors of various eras in the past,"⁸² the text is important in terms of interpreting cultural traumas. The story is viewed from the standpoint of the reality in the 21st century. The text about women of a 20th-century family is narrated by a woman. Everything seems to be in order, as "the family, who were successful confectioners in the times of the Russian Empire, were also successful in joining the ranks of the Soviet nomenklatura and survived the crisis of the 90s thanks to selling the leftovers from the past privileges."⁸³ However, as Tolstoy said, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, and the Jashis are also unhappy in their own way due to the Soviet reality. Therefore, the novel is not just a well-narrated story of one family, but a symbolic description of the hardships of the era. By means of the arid language of a dictionary and sweepingly listed historical events and dates,⁸⁴ the author attempts to show that the tragedies that befell the women are nothing other than a result of these events. Therefore, the narrator aunt presents Brilka, a representative of the eighth and last generation of her family, with a blank white sheet of paper, hoping that she will break this vicious circle and head towards a better future.

⁸⁰ Kikodze, *The Southern Elephant*, 146.

⁸¹ Luka Nakhutsrishvili, "Nino Haratischvili: In Search for Georgia's Place III [წიხობრატიმვილი:საქართველოსაღაგისძიებაშიIII]," *Social Justice Center* [სოციალური სამართლიანობის ცენტრი], September 24, 2019, <https://bit.ly/34rEQpw> (Accessed 11.05.2021).

⁸² Nakhutsrishvili, "Nino Haratischvili: In Search for Georgia's Place."

⁸³ Nakhutsrishvili, "Nino Haratischvili: In Search for Georgia's Place."

⁸⁴ Nakhutsrishvili, "Nino Haratischvili: In Search for Georgia's Place."

The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was a period of important, long-desired, although unexpected and painful changes in Georgia. The research covers the issues of everyday life, changing relationships and values, the ways of coping with the success as well as extremely painful events. The narratives of the past and the present were developed in the process of rapid and radical changes. These narratives were reflected in literary texts, in the sites of memory that formed and enhanced the meaning of particular facts. The study shows that the situation in Georgia in the last years of the Soviet period and the first years of independence corresponds to the trauma of victory. The last decade of the 20th century in Georgia was defined by several major events: the trauma and triumph of April 9, fragmentation of the society and civil confrontation, destruction of state institutions and economic collapse. The analyzed literary writings reflect and, at the same time, create the world of the 1990s, represent it from various perspectives, highlight the seemingly insignificant details that acquire new meaning. These works produced by authors who still have a strong emotional connection to the epoch, help us establish an emotional link with the events of the 90s. The texts were selected based on their popularity and recognition in the literary world; therefore, they have an impact on the formation of collective memory. Written since 1989, they disclose the events which take place in the center of the capital as well as in smaller towns and villages, allowing us to compare the attitudes towards the happenings at the time across regions. Analysis of the reflection of the general atmosphere in fictional texts reveals why the 90s became a decade that is easily recognized without specifying the century. Literary texts play a major role in understanding the uncomfortable and difficult-to-remember events, which society prefers to leave behind rather than scrutinize, further distancing them from history. They do not become part of the past but remain in the realm of myths and legends.

The artistic texts represented from many angles the world of the 90s and made it emotionally accessible with moods and sentiments, joy and pain, love and hatred, and expectations and disappointments of the era. At the same time, these texts allowed us to critically interpret the period. The research made it clear that the 1990s are depicted as a trauma of victory and these works played an important role in shaping it as such. The storyline determined by the laws and rules of the game of the 90s can be encountered in multiple texts and this process has continued up to now. Together with other media and probably more clearly than others, artistic texts presented April 9 as a culturally defined event encompassing both triumph and trauma. Unlike it, the civil confrontation has remained an unarticulated and unshaped event and society has been unable to reach a consensus on how to describe it.



Rezumat

O traumă colectivă consolidată în sfera memoriei culturale poate funcționa drept un factor unificator în interiorul grupului pentru o lungă perioadă de timp. Obiectivul acestui articol este să clarifice modul, în care zilele de 9 aprilie 1989 și 9 aprilie 1991, războiul din Tbilisi și confruntările civile asociate acestor evenimente, precum și o serie întreagă de schimbări radicale, profunde, bruște și intense au fost analizate, conceptualizate și interpretate în literatura de ficțiune și scrierile memorialistice produse după ce Georgia a devenit stat independent. Articolul își propune, de asemenea, să răspundă la întrebarea, în ce măsură folosirea noțiunilor de traumă și triumf este adecvată pentru cazul Georgiei, și în ce măsură (și dacă) realitatea anilor 1990 poate fi evaluată în termenii unei traume a victoriei. Autorul consideră că lucrările de ficțiune și memoriile au un rol foarte important în „construirea” unui eveniment drept un exemplu de traumă culturală. Pe de o parte, textele literare definesc și determină sensul unui eveniment, dându-i forma unei experiențe traumatice. Pe de altă parte, narațiunea este o metodă importantă pentru depășirea unei traume. Astfel, o traumă poate fi depășită printr-un proces constant de conceptualizare și analiză a acestei experiențe, și nu prin reprimarea sau tăcerea forțată în raport cu trauma respectivă.

Cuvinte-cheie: Georgia, traumă, triumf, texte literare.

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